1:Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1952.
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20

VIII. LIFE CYCLE

Pregnancy

After intercourse, conception depends on the will of the goddess ta-ë': it is she who gives the fetus its body and soul. When, overburdened with tasks, ta-ë' grows careless, the child is born with defects in mind or body. 842 [776]

We have already noted (pp. 22 and 46) the effects of a pregnant woman's intrusion in a clay pit or at maize planting, but on the whole there are few restrictions for her. She eats peppers lest the fetus become too fat, which would complicate birth; she eats the tripes of the alligator (jacaré-tinga) so that the child shall be born with a clear skin; and drinking the water of the *cipó barí* during pregnancy produces the same effect, as does staring at persons of white skin. Whoever eats double bananas will have only daughters. A real diet during pregnancy appears never to have been prescribed. If a girl is bitten by a type of ant called kaë'na, she will subsequently have children of a dark complexion. 843 [825]

Voluntary abortion.—A woman sometimes produces abortion in order to avoid the shame of having a "disqualified" child, i.e., one that belongs to no clan because its father is a Neobrazilian. Thus, an Indian girl named Neca, of the Rio Jacurapé, finding herself pregnant by a Neobrazilian, confessed her condition to her mother; both then concealed the affair from the girl's father, whom they feared, because he was a somewhat violent man. When Neca could no longer hide her pregnancy, the mother took her into the garden patch, where she succeeded in aborting the child by treading on the girl's belly. 847

According to legend, after an abortion, the cadaver of the fetus goes to ta-ë', who cooks it in a pot until it disintegrates. When the pan becomes full, the goddess keeps it until the death of the sinner, and thus addresses the soul when it arrives: "Thou hast slain the child I gave thee; now eat of thy property!" The sinful mother must eat the stew to the last morsel, however much she may beg and wail that she can eat no more. 847 775

Twins.—Twins (ta tarë'/pị; tarë, two) are not overly welcome since they increase the mother's work, but they are not killed. I myself knew a married couple in Igarapé de São Jeronymo who had twins; the reason was given me by an Indian, who asserted that the mother, while yet a child, had eaten double bananas. Others simply say that twins are due only to the will of ta-ë'. 845

Birth

When parturition is near, the husband erects a temporary platform close to the ground and hidden in a thicket some thirty paces behind the house. As soon as the pains begin, the woman is conducted there, where her hammock and mosquito bar are rigged up, and a piece of tururí bark cloth is spread over the platform. Her mother, aunt, or eldest sister attends her, the husband remaining in the house. If there are difficulties, a medicine man is sent for; smoking a tauary cigarette, he makes gestures with his hands as if he were opening some invisible object from below. 844 [755]

Blows on the back with the mouth of a manioc press are also recommended in difficult labor. The woman squats on her heels on the platform, with her arms

1:Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1952
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20

844 held behind on the hammock, and the woman assistant embraces her from behind. The umbilical cord is tied with cotton thread and cut with a small sliver of bamboo or canna brava. Even today an iron instrument is not used for this purpose. The wound is lightly cauterized, being touched once or twice with charcoal from a small tree gnawed round in circular fashion by a certain insect. The afterbirth is called na:'ana/(mouth) "because the child in the maternal womb nourishes itself by it"; it is buried at the place of birth.

947 *Infanticide.*—Infanticide immediately after birth occurs, though rarely, and then usually of an unmarried woman's offspring, the child being buried alive. In general, the Tukuna consider it a great sin, which ta-ë' will surely punish. An Indian I knew whose unmarried daughter became pregnant suspected her of planning infanticide and threatened her with death should she carry out her intention. Another reason for infanticide is that the child is "disqualified." For example, when dɔ'tanɨna had a child by a mestizo, the son of a Tukuna woman, her own father did not wish her to raise it, hence she buried it alive. After death an [775] infanticide ascends to heaven with the child's corpse held crosswise in her mouth, "like a bitch carrying her whelp."

●842 Many Tukuna fathers show an exaggerated preference for male children, to the detriment of daughters. I once, quite intimately, observed the disgust of a couple with their first-born, merely because it was a girl; they became vexed to the point of planning to kill her some weeks after birth. However, the mother's brother, as protector of his niece, reproached and threatened the couple so unmistakably that they never again dared discuss the subject.

846 856 *After the birth.*—The newborn child's mouth is immediately cleansed and the skull is manipulated, being pressed laterally between the fingers into the proper shape. The infant's body is washed in tepid water, the mother's in hot water. With a little stick a bit of the umbilical blood is rubbed on the child's cheeks so that they may become ruddy, just as a little of the first feces is rubbed on the eyebrows to make them grow thick and black, a feature very much esteemed. The Mongoloid birthmark on the skin of the sacral region is also attributed to these first feces. After the hammock and the mosquito bar are taken down, the platform is knocked apart, the tururí cloth is buried, and the midwife, followed by the mother, carries the child to the house.

751 846 Even before the birth the midwife takes care to scrape genipapo, with which the child is painted from head to toe on the first day, an old custom instituted by the culture hero dyöi' (see p. 128). This is considered an efficient protection against any evil that might befall the newborn infant. It is also the custom to [301] thread small bits of the root of a grass called ma'i"a-arɨ-ču'pɨ (*peripevɨ* [?], "of otter") as beads, tying them around the child's wrist and hand.

846 Father and mother must be cautious and must diet until the umbilical cord drops off. The mother sallies forth from her mosquito bar only to attend to her necessities and to bathe herself with tepid water; both parents eat only small fish, small birds, bananas, and manioc cakes, avoiding all acid foods. Except for going to the river to bathe, the father may not leave the house grounds, and he is for- [826] bidden to touch a firebrand, a paddle, an ax, or a bow. If he touches his bow, the child will develop a crooked spine and become a hunchback.

1:Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1952
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20

881 still on the tapir hide, and carry her to the river's edge, where the mother and the paternal uncle's wife remove her ornaments, while the arrow is stuck in the water some four meters from shore. Completely stripped, the vərëkj kneels naked in the water, and the same shamans who were busy with the arrow now wash her with [842] handfuls of water, always passing the liquid from feet to head to prevent her becoming prematurely pregnant. If the shamans overdo in this task, the girl will never have children; if, afterward, a girl is sterile, the same shamans must be called in again to undo the spell. Finally, the vərëkj crawls on all fours between the legs of one of the shamans, who remains standing in the water next to the arrow. Giving a leap and circling the arrow, she dives several times into the deeper water. While she is going ashore to be decorated anew, one of the shamans pulls out the arrow and holds it vertically over the surface of the river, while with the other hand he makes gestures with water toward the arrow. Once I saw a vərëkj, who was not carried to the bath but went afoot, throw before her path handfuls of ashes, on which she walked in order to protect herself against some malignant influence emanating from the earth.

The close of the ceremony.—The seclusion room and the platform beside it for the smoked meat are demolished, the wreckage being piled in the center of the house. This is swept, and all the rubbish, which is naturally considerable, is heaped up in burden baskets. Each guest takes an armful of the debris, and the women carry away the burden baskets full of rubbish, while others bundle up the dance staves, spears, and masquerade hooks. Thereupon all follow in procession to the river, where they throw their loads into the water (pl. 11, *c*). Unless this is done, all the residents of the house will sicken and slowly die.

On this occasion everyone takes a bath without removing his clothes; that is, [515] men, women, and children drag and toss one another into the river. Soon the clayey edge, wetted down by those entering and leaving, becomes so slick that any [522] push is sufficient to force a person to slip into the river. The scene arouses great hilarity and at times has a certain erotic stamp, but it is still an excellent refresher to raise the spirits of those who have drunk to excess.

The guests change their wet and muddy festive attire for workaday clothing, load their canoes, and leave, but those remaining behind take to their hammocks only after emptying the jars to the last drop of paiauarú. The house is again carefully swept and, as the only memory of the feast, there remains the vərëkj with a cloth wrapped round her head (pl. 15, *a*), costume fringes thrown over the highest rafters, a few costumes dangling from the house posts, and some dance staves that escaped destruction thrust beneath the roof thatch.

No remedy is applied to the vərëkj's denuded head; however, I once saw a [302] woman with a beautiful head of hair rub it over the girl's cranium immediately [757] after the depilation. I have never seen, or heard it said, that the operation has any disagreeable consequences for the girl except that she must wear a handkerchief tied round her head until the new hair has grown.

In the old days there was an additional ceremony immediately after the close of the feast, of which a remembrance is preserved in legends. The vərëkj was taken by her relatives to some fishing spot in the igarapé and, standing erect in the water, was washed with a solution of the drug timbó. It was hoped that this

2: Nimuendajú E-5 (1941-1942) 1948
SQ20 Tucuna SQ20

apart, which is correlated with their lack of social organisation other than blood ties. When drunk they quarrel and often cause injuries and death. In their dealings with the Neo-Brazilians, both parties exhibit their worst qualities. Nevertheless, the *Tucuna* are not unsociable and frequently visit one another and hold festive meetings, when they work collectively for their host. They retain tenaciously their original spiritual culture, although hard work has brought important material improvements. They now have good firearms, tools, clothes, and sewing machines, and they live in financial independence. Some, however, enticed to industrial establishments (rum factories) of the civilised people, become proletarian and then degenerate.

Moieties and clans.—The *Tucuna* are divided into two exogamous, unnamed patrilineal moieties, associated respectively with the east and west. One has 15 unlocalized, patrilineal sibs with tree names; the other has 21 sibs with bird names. Neither the clans nor moieties have outward distinguishing features, except for the private use of certain musical instruments on ceremonial occasions. There is no clear relationship between clan members and their eponym, except that a person's name refers obscurely to certain qualities of the animal or plant, thus revealing his clan. A person is named by his maternal relatives the day after his birth.

The *Tucuna* maintain moiety exogamy with strict inflexibility, and in 1941 still punished violations with death. They regard incest as a sin against the goddess Taé, who punishes it by making one insane during his life and by annihilating his soul after his death.

LIFE CYCLE

Birth and childhood.—After coitus, conception depends on Taé, who gives a soul to children. Abortion and infanticide are practiced, especially when the father is a Neo-Brazilian, as the child would be disqualified for sib and moiety membership. Otherwise, it is believed that infanticide is a sin and that Taé punishes the soul of the perpetrator after death.

Childbirth takes place in a temporary shelter prepared in the bush near the house. The newborn child is immediately painted with genipa. Both parents are confined and diet until the umbilical cord drops off. Children are carried in a woven cotton sling passing over a shoulder. Slings are double in part, so that a child sits in one portion while the other supports its back.

When a child begins to crawl, there is a feast in which it is painted with urucú and covered with bits of parrot feathers while the paint is still sticky. At another feast, formerly celebrated when the child was 2 but now when it is 4, its hair is pulled out and its ears pierced. Contrary to certain authors, this operation does not endanger a child's life. About 8 months later there is a supplementary feast when the hair, having grown again, is trimmed, and the relics of the previous feast are burned.